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ABSTRACT

Methods are described for the classroom management of disruptive children, defined as those who cannot be classified as emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded but who, either periodically or chronically, cause problems in classroom management or discipline. No attempt is made to provide exhaustive theoretical background, but, rather, concentration is upon practical suggestions that can be used by the teacher in managing disruptive behavior. Theory that is discussed is based upon the premise that disruptive behavior is a form of communicative behavior--i.e., the basis for most disruptive behavior is a state of pupil distress manifested by the child as a result of conditions prevailing in the home, at school, or both. Each chapter is divided into three parts, discussing (1) background information concerning the topic under investigation, (2) objectives relating to the role of the teacher in managment of disruptive behavior, and (3) recommended techniques for the management of such behavior. Topics discussed are: (1) the nature of disruptive behavior; (2) the disruptive child; (3) general management techniques; (4) the disruptive classroom; (5) when to call for help; (6) the emotionally disrupted child; (7) the disrupted teacher; and (8) research findings relating to disruptive behavior in the classroom. (MJB)

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Professional Studies

The Death of a Student and the Teacher

A National Education Association Publication

by

L. Wendell Rivers

The Disruptive Student and the Teacher

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National Education Association
Washington, D.C.

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom discipline is a major problem for many contemporary school teachers; however, conflict between teacher and child is as old as the classroom instructional environment itself. In spite of the vast number of articles which have been written on the subject, translation of knowledge into effective implementation has not kept pace with the changing nature of the problem.

Today we find that one of the chief violators of classroom rules is a child who cannot be classified as emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded, who is neither neurotic nor psychotic. In most cases, the child is not generally delinquent or criminally inclined; however, from the teacher's standpoint, the child is a periodic disruptive force within the learning environment. The primary focus of this report is upon such a child: the so-called "disruptive child."

No attempt is made in the following pages to present an exhaustive, theoretical discussion of the topics of classroom conflict and discipline. Instead, the major objective is to provide what I hope will be a valuable set of suggestions which can be utilized by the classroom teacher in the management of disruptive behaviors. The scope of these suggestions covers behaviors which span the spectrum from mild periodic disruptions to highly unacceptable expressions which are chronic in their occurrence.

The suggestions contained in the following chapters were derived from interviews conducted by the author with elementary school teachers, secondary school teachers, and counselors. The length of teaching experience of those interviewed averaged fifteen years—the shortest experiential period was one school year and the longest, twenty-seven school years. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to those who shared with me the experiences and insights which served as the practical basis of this report.

Theoretically, my position is straightforward and simple. I firmly believe that the precipitating basis for most disruptive behavior in the classroom is a state of *distress* manifested by the child as a result of conditions which prevail in the home, in the school, or both. Distress, in this context, is defined as mild to moderate anguish within the emotional system which requires responses (usually verbal) that are not functional in the verbal-expressive repertoire of the child. Thus, disruptive behavior is viewed as *communicative behavior.*

It is a fact that not many teachers have the time, or the training, to perform in-depth behavioral analyses of each child who disrupts the classroom. Teachers need quick and effective techniques for directing the child's disruptive communications into understandable and constructive channels.

Each chapter is divided into three parts:

1. Background information concerning the topic under discussion;
2. A set of objectives which relate to the role of the teacher in the management of disruptive behavior;
3. Recommended techniques for the management of disruptive classroom behavior.

Figure 1

CONSISTENCY OF DISRUPTIONS

Category	Day					Week Total
	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
Total:						

THE NATURE OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behaviors are not manifested in clearly defined actions with labels attached; however, there are tendencies for certain acts to cluster and to find expression on a fairly consistent basis. Modern literature relating to school mental health is replete with examples of pupil behavior scales which have been used for descriptive purposes; from these, an incredibly long list of behaviors have been identified and labeled as disruptive.

Close examination of this list shows a great deal of overlap in the categories defined. The behaviors of central importance for our purposes are those generally referred to as *acting-out behaviors,* and may be recognized by the degree to which they serve to thrust the child into the foreground and attract the attention of the class. The most common of these may be classified under the following categories:

1. Exhibits physical and verbal aggression toward classmates (fighting, instigation of arguments)
2. Exhibits verbal aggression toward teacher and other authority figures (profanity, negative names)
3. Refuses to cooperate in classroom group activities
4. Intentionally damages classroom materials
5. Uses classroom materials to create disruptive sounds and noises.

Obviously, every child who attends school will engage at one time or another in behavior which may be easily fitted into one or more of these categories. The important factor in recognizing the child who needs special management is the *consistency* with which these behaviors occur. A child who commits a disruptive act once a month certainly should not be considered unusual; but the child who breaks the rules consistently throughout the school week should be the focus of special management techniques. Therefore, the teacher should note the number of times per day, or per week, that a child performs disruptive acts, and keep a consistency index of those disruptions.

The consistency index is a simple device which allows the teacher to keep count of the number of disruptions that occur over a predetermined period of time. Such a device, based on a unit of one week, is shown in Figure 1. Through the use of this device, a teacher can quickly determine whether a particular child's disruptions are single, isolated incidents, or whether they represent a potentially constant mode of communication. The critical factors in the evaluation of the consistency index are:

1. The number of acts in any given category;
2. The total number of disruptive acts across categories;
3. The day of the week when disruptive acts reach their highest frequency.

Effective use of a consistency index depends upon a number of variables, the most important of which relate to the nature and number of behavioral limitations imposed by the teacher on the class as a whole, and on individual students in particular. Not until the teacher decides what behaviors will be tolerated in the learning environment will the utilization of the index become a meaningful activity.

Objective 1:

Teachers should **determine** what behaviors are unacceptable in the classroom.

Objective 2:

Teachers should **determine** how many times each unacceptable behavior will be allowed to occur before special management techniques are employed.

Objective 3:

Teachers should **determine** the period of time over which unacceptable behaviors will be allowed to occur before special management techniques are employed.

Objective 4:

Teachers should **transmit** the limitations determined in objectives one through three to the class in clear and understandable terminology.

Objective 5:

Students should be able to **demonstrate** verbally their understanding of classroom behavior limitations.

Recommendation A:

It is recommended that a consistency index be constructed and employed as early in the school year as possible –preferably during the first week. Through its use, information concerning the occurrence and clustering of disruptive acts can be obtained quickly. In addition, baseline data is gathered which will serve as a starting point for the management techniques which may be administered.

Recommendation B:

Rules and regulations, based on the achievement of Objectives 1 through 3, should be established. Once all of the objectives have been achieved, it becomes a simple matter to identify the child who may establish a pattern of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The decisions which result from completion of the objectives should serve as the basis for scoring the consistency index. A child who exceeds teacher-determined limits becomes the focus of special management techniques.

THE DISRUPTIVE CHILD

It is not meaningful to group children who periodically manifest disruptive behavior according to racial, ethnic, or subcultural membership; nor is it reasonable to apply labels such as unruly, disruptive, or disturbed to children of these groups. However, certain behaviors and social variables are characteristic of children who consistently disrupt the classroom. This chapter will focus on these factors.

While children who exhibit disruptive behaviors often are perceived as suffering from some psychiatric illness, this perception is inaccurate for the majority of children who disrupt the classroom. Most of the factors posited as causative in disruptive behavior do, however, suggest an inverse relationship between verbal accessibility and disruptive behavior. Verbal commands or reprimands have low impact value for these children; they appear more action prone than verbally active in expressing positive and negative emotionality.

This is particularly true of children who communicate through physically or verbally aggressive channels. These children do not possess a constantly operating aggressive drive which, when not manifested in overt behavior, is still present in the unconscious. Instead, they apparently are predisposed to arousal when their capacities to communicate in nonaggressive ways are environmentally suppressed or are not functional. Children who consistently disrupt a class are, in many cases, distressed children, and their disruptive behaviors represent indirect attempts to communicate this distress to the teacher or to significant classmates.

There is a definite relationship between school behavior and academic level. Children distressed by the difficulty of school work are apt to communicate this feeling through disruptive behaviors. On the other hand, gifted children can also be highly disruptive if their special abilities are not recognized and given attention. There is little doubt that the child for whom school work presents a distress-producing encounter, or for whom school work is too easy or is of no interest, is a potentially disruptive force in the classroom.

A significant relationship also exists between disruptive classroom behavior and the degree to which a child is accepted socially by his peers. Children who have achieved high social acceptance tend to participate actively in the classroom in a positive fashion and to conform well to rules and regulations, whereas children of low social acceptance tend not to conform to rules and do not participate well. The latter may display disruptive behaviors which seem directed toward gaining the attention of their classmates. Behaviors such as annoying others, moving about the room, and displaying physical aggression communicate feelings of low social acceptance. Many gang fights can be traced to attempts by children to demonstrate their adherence to the standards of the group, even when these standards clash with those of the school. In this context, aggression is used as a distress-reductive tool and is a form of dues paid by the child for social acceptance.

Some children may have serious physical problems that are not detected by the teacher. It has been estimated that as many as one-fourth of the elementary school children in the United States have some form of physical disorder that seriously interferes with their social adjustment and scholastic achievement. Such physical factors can contribute to disruptive behaviors. The physical and nutritional status of the child exerts a direct influence on his conduct: a hungry or tired child is primed for the eruption of misbehaviors. Nor are active cases of tuberculosis, anemia, diabetes, hypertension, and nervous system disorders uncommon in the public school population, especially in large urban institutions.

More than 35 labels have been devised to characterize children who disrupt as a result of what are believed to be physical reasons. Such terms as hyperkinetic, cognitive defect, and learning disabled are inadequate attempts to explain why children misbehave when no psychological reasons for the behaviors can be readily determined.

It is vital to realize that a child with a physical problem may not be aware of its influence on his or her behavior. Consequently, attempts to communicate the difficulty take the form of behaviors which are seen by the teacher as disruptive. For example, a child with undiagnosed deafness or poor vision may appear dull or disinterested, or may be overly assertive in trying to compensate for these defects. The true cause of student misbehavior frequently goes unnoticed because teachers, parents, and counselors are unaware of the relationship between physical disorders and disruptive behavior.

Certain physical conditions in the classroom environment also encourage disruptive behavior. The design and organization of the classroom may contribute to a variety of these disruptions; overcrowding and poor lighting are two factors known to have a direct, negative effect on classroom behavior. For example, restlessness, inattention, frequent physical encounters, and property destruction can be traced to the influence of overcrowding. Concentration is difficult under such conditions, and the children frequently are distracted from the tasks at hand, usually with consequent displays of unacceptable behavior.

Some children guilty of consistent classroom disruption may simply be modeling behaviors observed at home. Such children are often punished for offenses committed in innocence, in imitation of what adults say or do. Children who come from homes in which there is little or no appreciation of property may destroy school property without the feelings of guilt which teachers feel should be present. Where the home life is characterized by quarreling, children may therefore engage in quarrelsome behavior in the school setting. Children who live in homes where lawlessness is the norm cannot be expected to be law-abiding in the classroom without some special management.

Home and community norms are frequently mirrored in school behavior. It is vital, however, that teachers realize that disruptive behavior is not limited to the so-called culturally-deprived child. Activities ranging from minor, periodic disruptions to hard-core, delinquent behaviors can be observed in children from all social and economic classes.

Public schools have failed to provide remedial programs designed to offset students' physical, social, and intellectual difficulties. Consequently, it is left to the individual teacher to contend with the manifestations of these difficulties, which often are communicated by children in the form of disruptive behaviors. Use of a consistency index will aid teachers in early recognition of potentially disruptive children. The objectives and recommendations which follow suggest ways in which teachers may aid the child in dealing with the factors which form the basis for many disruptive communications.

When, through use of the consistency index, it is found that a particular child represents a potentially disruptive element in the class, achievement of the appropriate following objectives will aid in development of management strategies.

Objective 1:

The teacher should **speak** with the child in *private* to ascertain the genesis of the consistent misbehavior.

Objective 2:

If no satisfactory answer is derived from this initial interview, then the **achievement** of the following objectives should be accomplished.

Objective 3:

An **examination** should be made of all school *medical records* concerning the child in question.

Objective 4:

A **review** of the child's *past academic performance* should be undertaken for the purpose of uncovering persistent scholastic difficulties.

Objective 5:

Psychological test results should be **examined** in order to determine if there are *intellectual or emotional conditions* which may account for unusual classroom behaviors.

Objective 6:

The social interactions of the child should be **observed** and *peer relationships* carefully noted.

Objective 7:

The *family and community background* of the child should be **examined** for probable contributing problematic situations.

Recommendation A:

Not all of these objectives need to be achieved in regard to a particular child. Those which should be pursued will depend on the preliminary conclusions reached by the teacher from the initial interview, and from nonformal observations.

Recommendation B:

From health records provided by the school nurse or physician, the teacher may learn of physical problems which are not obvious from casual observations or interviews with the child. It is important that the physical appearance, motor development, sensory integrity, and general health of the child be given careful consideration when a link is sought between disruptive behavior and the physical status of the child.

Recommendation C:

All teachers should insist upon at least minimum classroom cleanliness and comfort for themselves and their students. If the physical surroundings are below acceptable standards, then it is unrealistic to expect appropriate behavior or adequate teaching and learning to take place. Classroom lighting, temperature level, sanitation, and furniture condition and organization must meet minimum standards.

Recommendation D:

The limited home training of some students should be taken into account. Although it may not be possible for teachers to impact upon the home life of a disruptive student, knowledge about probable contributions of the home and community environment to the child's disruptive classroom performance will serve to suggest management strategies.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The major goal in the application of disruptive behavior management techniques involves the establishment of appropriate channels of communication between teacher and student; student and classmates; and the student and himself or herself. In essence, the child who is disruptive must select acceptable and understandable modes of communication in the expression of feelings of distress. "Acceptable" communications must be in a language that the teacher understands and that is not disruptive within the classroom setting. It becomes the task of the teacher to provide the child with models of the appropriate and understandable techniques and modes of expression. This is the ultimate focus of the techniques which are discussed in this chapter.

The specific actions taken by the teacher depend upon a number of factors. These include the student involved; the category and seriousness of the misbehavior; the policy of the school administration; and the skill possessed by the teacher. It should be understood that no single method of management is equally effective with all children. Age, sex, and social class differences are intertwined with individual differences, and all require a broadly creative approach to behavior management. This is not to suggest that teachers should attempt to emulate psychologists or psychiatrists in their management efforts. Rather, it is suggested that they focus upon preventing the behavior of one child from interfering with the learning opportunities of others, and try to bring the misbehaving child into a communicative relationship that will allow the educational experiences to be fruitful.

The following objectives are ordered in sequence of performance, because each represents a decision point for the teacher in interactions with a child who is disrupting the class. The principal decision which must be made at each point is whether to continue the interaction of the teacher with child, or to refer the child to a third party for corrective action.

Objective 1:

Distinguish between unintentional and intentional disruptions.

Objective 2:

Politely, but firmly, **ask** the child to stop the disruptive behavior.

Objective 3:

Remove the child from the classroom to a place where it is possible to talk for a maximum of five minutes.

Objective 4:

Explain to the child, as briefly as possible, what the misbehavior is and indicate what rules have been broken.

Objective 5:

Ask the child to tell you what caused the frequent misbehaviors.

Objective 6:

Encourage the child to strive for greater self-control while in the classroom.

Objective 7:

Return with the child to the classroom with his or her verbal assurance that the behavior(s) will not be repeated.

Objective 8:

Compare and **contrast** the child's stated perceptions of the problem with your own perceptions.

Objective 9:

Begin a period of **observation** of the child. Use the consistency index to note whether the misbehaviors are occurring less frequently. Also note any changes in the types of disruptions caused by the child.

Objective 10:

Compliment the child for each day that passes without a disruption. This should be done with **sincerity** and with **as little fanfare** as possible.

Recommendation A:

The achievement of Objective 10 will signal a significant reduction in the number of disruptive acts performed by most children. If the child continues to disrupt the class at the same or greater frequency, then Objective 11 should be undertaken.

Objective 11:

Take a diagnostic look at the child and **determine** what established policies exist for dealing with the continuing disruptive behavior.

Objective 12:

If the child's disruptive behaviors include such acts as demanding constant attention, stealing, frequent outbreaks of verbal hostility, physical attacks on

other children, frequent cheating on school work and constant lying, then corrective procedures should **focus** upon the **emotional domain.**

Objective 13:

If the child's communicative acting-out includes such behaviors as showing off, deliberately annoying others, restlessness, defacing school furniture, constant talking, and clowning, then corrective measures should focus upon the **social domain.**

Objective 14:

If the child deviates significantly from the general physical developmental level of the class; and *if* there are physical abnormalities, problems in muscular movements, or significant handicaps such as visual, hearing, cosmetic or speech problems, then corrective procedures should focus upon the **physical domain.**

Objective 15:

If the child's disruptive behaviors include such acts as profanity, impertinent language, or obscenity, then corrective procedures should focus upon the **environmental domain** (both home and school community).

Recommendation B:

Regardless of the nature of the acting out behavior, the intellectual status of the child should be assessed immediately.

Objective 16:

If the current intellectual status of the child is significantly **lower** or significantly **higher** than that of his peers, then corrective procedures should take this factor into account.

Recommendation C: (Focus Objective 12)

It must be understood that emotionally based disruptive behavior represents ways in which children protect themselves from increasing feelings of distress. The teacher must learn to decode these verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, which provide clues to the child's emotional life space. Once these are understood, the main task is to redirect these communications into acceptable and emotionally functional channels. When the source of the disruptive behavior is found to be within the emotional domain, the teacher should:

Objective 17:

Allow the child to ventilate feelings of distress verbally. **Arrange** a situation in which the child can be safely encouraged to **drain off** in word and action, these feelings.

Objective 18:

Assign the child to tasks which safely and appropriately release muscle tenseness and rigidity. Any activity which involves physical exertion will have a moderately therapeutic effect.

Objective 19:

Talk with the child. The teacher should express an understanding of the meaning of the misbehavior. **Listen** to the child and make a continuing attempt to decode the communications. **Provide** the child with acceptable verbal labels for feelings of distress.

Recommendation D: (Focus Objective 13)

The child's relationship with the peer group should be understood by the teacher. Personal grooming habits and sex role identification should be carefully noted. When it is found that the major source of disruptive behavior is in the social domain, then the following procedural objectives are suggested.

Objective 20:

Assess the nature and intensity of peer pressures impinging upon the child within the classroom. The basic source of the behavior may stem from direct group influence.

Objective 21:

Identify significant actors in the classroom who have a negative influence on the child's behavior.

Objective 22:

Arrange a group conference in which displeasure is expressed and classroom rules are stressed. **Calmly** but **firmly** confront the significant others in the group with knowledge of their input into the child's behavior.

Objective 23:

Explain to the child how she or he is being influenced by others. Conclude

the conference on a friendly note, while emphasizing the need for both the child and the peers to modify their behavior.

Objective 24:

Move the disruptive child if it is physically possible. It is sometimes wise to change the seating assignment so that a misbehaving child is exposed to different, more positive social influences.

Recommendation E: (Focus Objective 14)

If the major source of the disruptive behavior is determined to be in the physical domain, the nature and severity of the condition must be determined before educational procedures can be devised which will be effective in its control. Teachers should:

Objective 25:

Examine health records for indications of the limitations placed on the child's behavioral output by the nature of the disorder.

Objective 26:

Find the classroom seating location which most suitably accommodates the child's particular problem.

Objective 27:

Don't allow the child's classmates to make fun of the disorder under any circumstances.

Objective 28:

Talk with the child about his or her classroom behavior in reference to the physical limitations; **adjust** school work levels to allow the child to succeed.

Objective 29:

Request that the child be given complete medical tests and examinations.

Objective 30:

Help the child to understand as much as possible about the nature of the physical limitations. Verbally communicate this information, and emphasize what is behaviorally possible rather than the restrictive aspects of the disorder.

Recommendation F: (Focus Objective 15)

Such factors as lack of home training, negative community influences, and poor parental modeling constitute environmental factors requiring corrective measures that are, in many cases, beyond the direct modification of the teacher. However, the teacher is able to determine when these influences are communicated in the classroom. It is recommended that the teacher attempt to deal with these problems at the parental level by:

Objective 31:

Learning what rules for interpersonal conduct are accepted in the home and neighborhood environment. Understanding the rules for interpersonal communications should be of central concern.

Objective 32:

Emphasizing to the child the differences that exist between acceptable communicative behavior in the classroom and that which is commonly used in the home and community.

Objective 33:

Contacting the parents. The parents should be told exactly what the child is doing that constitutes misbehavior in the classroom, and that the child will be isolated from the rest of the class until the disruptive behaviors are curtailed.

Recommendation G: (Focus Objective 16)

The ability to communicate is critical to good school performance and behavior. This ability is dependent upon the intellectual integrity of the child. It is recommended that each teacher have, for ready reference, valid information concerning the intellectual status of each child. This information may be obtained from the results of tests, preferably criterion referenced tests of intellectual ability. In addition, the teacher should determine:

Objective 34:

If the disruptive child has *impaired judgment* or limited reasoning ability.

Objective 35:

If the child's *abilities relate* to grade level placement.

Objective 36:

If the disruptive behavior is accompanied by *mental impairment* or boredom which stems from the child's being in a grade below actual ability.

The recommendations and objectives presented in this chapter are based on a specific philosophy of discipline held by the writer: Pupils who frequently misbehave may be reached through appropriate communication and humanistic concern. Disruptive students must be made to understand that there are certain rules which are helpful to them and that their behavior is not in line with these expectations. A creative teacher will be able to devise communicative strategies for dealing with the majority of children who disrupt.

THE DISRUPTIVE CLASSROOM

Regardless of grade level, each classroom is a highly complex array of skills, temperaments, conflicts, and needs. These factors interact to produce an emotional climate which not only affects group behavior, but has a direct effect on the behavior of each individual student as well. To a great extent there is a dynamic interaction between a child and the immediate environment. Disruptive behavioral output is generally established upon this interaction. Thus, there is reciprocal stimulation between child and group. If a class is characterized by a generally unstable emotional tone, the child who is potentially disruptive will find strong reinforcement for forms of communication which are reflective of the group mood. Operationally, classroom emotional tone refers to the combination of factors that can cause a group to move from a state of calm to one of high disorder.

A child who is predisposed toward the expression of disruptive behaviors will perform these behaviors when the appropriate cues are present in the immediate social environment. Even though the source of classroom disorder may be one child, the influence of the whole class must be considered. There is evidence which suggests that these influences are most intense during certain times during the day and week, and before and after certain school events. The classroom teacher is able to do a great deal toward maintaining a stable classroom climate if aware of these periods.

Objective 1:

The teacher should **devote** a portion of classroom time to the establishment of the emotional climate of the group.

Recommendation A:

Mood establishment exercises should be made an integral part of each day's activities. Active relaxation exercises have proven useful in this regard. An opportune time for this activity is the first few minutes of each period.

Objective 2:

Establish **routines** which are integral components of each day's activities.

Recommendation B:

One of the most critical times with respect to classroom stability is the last ten minutes prior to the lunch period. It is also recommended that assignments which require relative immobility on the part of the class be alternated with those which allow relative freedom of movement and which make low intensity, concentrative demands.

Objective 3:

Use the response of the class as a source of feedback to each child.

Recommendation C:

Group rewards should be tied to individual behavior. Make it clear to the class that disruptive behavior on the part of individual member will lead directly to the removal of any promised class rewards.

Objective 4:

Deal directly with all forms of group physical aggression.

Recommendation D:

Acts of physical aggression should be immediately confronted. It has been found that when teachers specify to the aggressors *and* to the class what has occurred, and what is appropriate, the likelihood that other students will become involved in the same type of behavior is minimized.

Objective 5:

Provide opportunities for controlled physical movement within the class.

Recommendation E:

Few adults could tolerate the pain of sitting in wooden or plastic seats for as long as some pupils are expected to sit. Students should be given opportunities to move about the room for meaningful purposes. It is recommended that learning activities which require physical involvement or movement be integrated into the standard curriculum, in order to provide an atmosphere in which the student does not feel chained to a desk.

Objective 6:

Classroom assignment should be **varied** in order to eliminate **monotony**. A limited amount of change and surprise should be interjected into curriculum materials. Boredom constitutes a major source of disruptive classroom behavior. Monotonous class assignments appear cumulative in their influence or the production of group and individual boredom.

Recommendation F:

Teachers should ensure that extracurricular activities are relevant to all of the students in the class. Urban public school children represent a broad cross section of social and economic classes as well as a wide spectrum of subcultural groups. To offer a set of activities attractive to this entire range of group diversity is difficult. However, many youngsters attend school and do well academically mainly because of the attraction of group membership and extracurricular experiences. Those activities should not be designed for only the middle class child.

WHEN TO CALL FOR HELP

When the teacher cannot communicate with a child with regard to disruptive acting-out, third parties must be involved, or the problem turned over to someone else entirely. Occasionally a teacher will encounter a child whose level of distress has suppressed the ability to communicate the difficulty in acceptable symbolic acts, and whose behavior has passed the point at which the teacher can be of help. The teacher must be able to recognize this point and the level of behavioral manifestation which exceeds it, and must also be aware of available specialized resources to which the child can be referred.

Objective 1:

Teachers should **seek** immediate assistance when drugs become a factor in a pupil's disruptive behavior. *Don't* attempt to handle this problem alone.

Recommendation A:

Teachers should **know** the facts concerning the availability and effects of narcotics on behavior. Most students do, whether they use them or not. A specific case of drug abuse should be referred to the school counselor or principal.

Objective 2:

Treat a specific case of drug abuse as a *health problem* rather than as a law enforcement problem.

Recommendation B:

Experts in the field of drug abuse and drug counseling within the community should be identified and contacted as possible sources of information and referral before cases of drug abuse arise in the classroom. If drug abuse is detected from a student's appearance and behavior, it should be treated as any other extreme medical-behavioral problem, and the proper personnel should be enlisted for its management.

Objective 3:

Teachers **should not** try to play the role of psychologist or psychiatrist.

Recommendation C:

The condition of suffering from severe emotional disturbance may be made worse by a teacher who is well meaning, but unschooled in psychotherapeutic techniques. Learn to recognize the signs of severe emotional disturbance and,

upon confirmation of the condition, *call for help.* The following objectives should aid in the management of a child who appears highly disturbed:

Objective 4:

Calmly tell the child exactly what you feel is disruptive about his/her behavior.

Objective 5:

Notify the child's parents of the condition and behavior.

Objective 6:

Immediately **seek help** from specialists in determining the health status of the child and a course of action to be followed.

Objective 7:

Follow up on your referrals on a daily basis. If the child has to be removed from school, periodically **contact** the parents and inquire about the status of the child. Ask them to convey your concern to the child.

Objective 8:

Contact specialists about the probability of the child's returning to or remaining in your classroom, and determine what special curricular and physical accommodations will be required for education and management.

Recommendation D:

Whenever disruptive behavior severely threatens the physical or emotional well-being of the teacher or other children in the class, the disruptive child should be removed from the class.

Objective 9:

A student who is removed from the class should be *accompanied* directly to the principal's office. The student should not be sent directly home by the classroom teacher.

Objective 10:

A principal-teacher-parent-pupil **conference** should be immediately **arranged.** The pupil should be required to remain in the school, but out of the class until such a conference has occurred.

Objective 11:

Indicate that you will not assume full responsibility for the management of a physically violent child.

Objective 12:

If the child is known to be in possession of weapons, then the appropriate law enforcement sources should be **contacted immediately.**

Recommendation E:

At no time should teachers expose themselves to physical harm, unless it is to prevent another child from being assaulted by the disruptive child. Plans should be made at the beginning of the school year for emergency procedures to be followed in case of excessive violent behavior in the classroom. Personnel should be identified whose aid will be enlisted immediately.

Recommendation F:

The following objectives describe four major categories of behaviors which should signal that help be sought in communicating with the child. An examination of behaviors listed in these objectives will reveal that some of the behaviors differ only in degree from those which may be observed in most children. The unmanageable disruptive child manifests these behaviors more often, with greater intensity, and more readily.

Objective 13:

If the child frequently displays *uncontrollable verbal hostility,* **refer** the child to the school psychologist.

Objective 14:

If the child frequently has *dilation* of the *pupils,* sleeps most of the time while in class, and often has *incoherent speech,* **refer** the child to school medical personnel.

Objective 15:

If the child is *disliked* by most of his or her classmates, is extremely timid, and appears to be generally fearful, **refer** the child to the school psychologist for diagnostic evaluation.

Objective 16:

If the child manifests high level delinquent identification and engages in frequent acts of physical violence, **refer** the child to the principal or assistant principal.

Recommendation F:

Referrals for the uncommunicative and disruptive child are determined by the nature of the problem; generally, however, they fall into the following categories:

Medical personnel and facilities
Guidance clinics
Psychologists
Social agencies
Courts
Parents

Use them when you cannot communicate with a child who frequently disrupts the learning environment for which you have direct responsibility.

THE EMOTIONALLY DISRUPTED CHILD

When a child is experiencing a level of distress which undermines the structure and function of communicative behaviors, the child is generally considered emotionally disrupted (or disturbed). The major behaviors which characterize these children within the classroom includes:

Poor academic achievement
Poor peer relationship
Inappropriate aggressiveness
Temper tantrums
Reading problems
Stealing
Physical complaints
Bizarre behaviors
Language and speech disturbances

Normal children will sometimes communicate distressful emotions by hitting other children, or stealing, or throwing temper tantrums. The emotionally disrupted child is distinguished by the fact of exhibiting these behaviors in the presence of the wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and—most characteristically—to an inappropriate degree. On the one hand, there are disrupted children whose behavior cannot be easily ignored in the classroom, whose bizarre aggressive and antisocial communications create pronounced problems for the teacher. On the other hand, there are disrupted children whose inappropriate communications may be easily overlooked by the teacher. These are the children who are withdrawn, who appear cooperative but are passive and quiet to the extent that they go unnoticed by the teacher until they become overly noncommunicative.

One of the major problems that confronts the teacher in trying to deal with the disrupted child is distinguishing between behaviors which indicate a high level of distressful functioning and behaviors which are developmentally appropriate for children of a certain sex, age, subculture, and grade level. The major contribution that a teacher can make in preventing the development of disrupted states in pupils is to participate in the early identification of distress-based acting-out behaviors. This task is confounded by the fact that teachers are *not* prepared to make the distinction between a form of behavioral communication that indicates the beginning of a severe emotional problem and one that is simply a response to a developmental or temporary environmental event.

Nevertheless, early identification of distress-based emotional disruption is critical in preventing the development of behavior which may make the child incapable of benefiting from traditional classroom instruction. Generally it is the teacher, through daily contact with the child, who is in a position to identify early signs of emotional disruption, and who can act as an initial referral source for the child. In order to do this, the teacher must be prepared to take the time to become familiar with the facts of emotional disruption.

Recommendation A:

Teachers should obtain knowledge of how children's behavior is observed and evaluated by mental health professionals.

Objective 1:

Teachers should **talk** with mental health professionals who are familiar with their population of students.

Objective 2:

Teachers **should learn** to identify factors within the classroom environment which may contribute to the distress of the child.

Objective 3:

Teachers **should learn** to identify the forces outside of the classroom which act as contributing factors in the child's disruptive communications.

Objective 4:

Teachers **should learn** to identify the child's pattern of classroom social relations which may contain indications of the development of severe emotional disruption.

Recommendation B:

If a child has been diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, but not severely enough to be put into a special class, the teacher of the class in which she or he remains should attempt to provide a self-esteem building program for that child. No attempts should be made to elicit "unconscious material" in order to make analytic statements about the child's functioning. Rather, attempts should be made gradually to replace inadequate patterns of communication with more appropriate and effective ones.

Objective 5:

Academic assignments should be **personalized** and organized to accommodate the interests and life experiences of the child.

Objective 6:

Assignment levels should start at a point at which the child is competent. Tasks should be simplified and appropriately modified when the child appears distressed by the effort required for that task.

Objective 7:

Complex tasks should be **organized** into separate components and then placed in sequential order for completion.

Objective 8:

Always *provide positive feedback* for successful performance. For young children, approval and praise are usually sufficient.

Objective 9:

Do not *overprotect* the child. Try to relate to her or him. There should be times when the child is allowed to work out a problem with a reasonable amount of stress present. Children should always be encouraged to work out problems on their own level.

Objective 10:

Help the child to develop a positive self-image. This is probably the most important contribution that a teacher can make toward the reduction of a child's distressful feelings.

Objective 11:

Separate the child from children who present other behavioral problems in the classroom. If possible, **seat** her or him next to the child whom you identify as the most emotionally stable in the classroom.

Objective 12::

Keep an anecdotal record in addition to the consistency index. This record should be discussed with the school psychologist or counselor on a periodic basis.

Objective 13:

Try to **avoid labeling** the child, or accepting labels for the child from outside sources.

Objective 14:

Talk to teachers who have taught the child in the past. Try to **obtain** as much positive information as possible about the child's sensitivity to various teaching and program techniques.

Objective 15:

Parents should be brought into the education process whenever possible. Teachers should base their interactions with the parents of a disturbed child upon **providing** and **obtaining** information about the child. The relationship should be characterized by a positive and truthful exchange.

THE DISRUPTED TEACHER

Many teachers, especially those of the early grades, have to try to teach a child who is too distressed to be taught. Such a child demands constant attention, disrupts the class, and generally causes the teacher to feel a sense of confusion and failure. Most severe emotional disturbance is first diagnosed in the classroom by the teacher. Although special provisions for these children are being made by school officials across the country, the waiting lists for special services are exceptionally long. Meanwhile, the teacher, the child, and the class are often badly disrupted.

Feelings of rage, guilt, and even terror are not uncommon among teachers who are confronted with the prospect of trying to each a highly disrupted and disruptive child. Some teachers make the mistake of becoming overinvolved in the child and then find themselves upset and angry when their efforts at therapeutic intervention fail. In addition to contending with the disrupted child, many urban teachers must also deal daily with conditions of classroom overcrowding, low salaries, and groups of students who are highly heterogeneous in intellectual and and developmental achievement. Is it any wonder that some teachers resort to behaviors which are in themselves productive of misbehavior in students?

In this chapter, we shall present recommendations and objectives which relate to teacher behaviors which should be avoided because of their disruptive potential.

Recommendation A:

Physical punishment temporarily stops disruptive behavior, but it does not permanently eliminate it. It is an antiquated form of control and can be dangerous in its effect to teacher and child. There is much evidence to suggest that physical punishment is ineffective in changing the behaviors which are generally regarded as dirsuptive. In addition to doubts about the educational aspects of the use of physical punishment as a control measure in the classroom, there is the question of whether the teacher has the legal right to administer it. It is recommended that, even where permitted, physical punishment be used only as a last resort and then only to stop behaviors which may be dangerous to the disruptive child or his classmates.

Recommendation B:

A teacher who is experiencing a great deal of distress will often attempt to manage these feelings and the classroom by becoming overly authoritarian toward the pupils. This leads to the imposition of arbitrary rules, overreaction to the slightest challenge of classroom control, and a disregard for individual differences in pupil personality. It is recommended that as few rules as possible be established for a given classroom. However, it is also recommended that, once rules are fairly conceived and established, they sould be enforced with as much consistency as is possible. It must be remembered that no set of rules can cover all classroom behaviors, and teachers should not restrict themselves by establishing rules which cannot be enforced without creating a disrupted classroom mood.

Recommendation C:

When confronted with a child whose behavior is highly disruptive, a teacher may respond with anger. This is a natural response which must be allowed to run its course. However, one of the most dangerous acts that a teacher can perform is to punish a child while anger is present to a heightened degree. Under conditions of anger, perceptions are likely to be inaccurate and judgment becomes impaired. Thus, punishment administered at this time may very will produce a worse situation than that which the punishment is intended to control. When a misbehaving child arouses anger, a teacher should not attempt to administer any form of correction until the angry feelings have been reasonably resolved. The teacher should not ridicule or threaten the child nor resort to sarcasm or name-calling. Such actions can only lead to embarrassment for the teacher and for the class. Try never to argue with a disruptive student.

Recommendation D:

Some teachers feel that if they are able to get *all* of the students in a class to like them, they will be free to carry out the job for which they were hired without classroom disruptions. Although this is an admirable goal, it usually is impossible, or at least difficult, to accomplish. Even if it were possible, the desired effect would not be guaranteed. It is recommended that teachers modify any intense needs to be liked by all of their pupils. No matter how friendly or kindly the teacher, there will be children who will engage in consistently disruptive behaviors. Reliance should be placed in good lesson preparation, the establishment and enforcement of fair rules for classroom conduct, a clean and attractive classroom, and a pleasant classroom mood as the major behavioral control elements. The superficially sweet, frequently condescending teacher is usually amusing to most students.

Recommendation E:

It is recommended that special inservice programs be established for helping teachers to deal with some of their personal reactions to highly disruptive children. A teacher who is unaware of repressed anger and hostility toward a child will find that these feelings manifest themselves at most inappropriate times and with disruptive effects. Or worse, they may emerge as a condition of irritability which is generalized to other pupils, other teachers, and family members. It is recommended that inservice workshops be directed toward these objectives:

Objective 1:

Teachers should strive to **establish** a positive **reality orientation** toward the population of students for whom they are responsible.

Objective 2:

Teachers should learn to **recognize** their own **hostility** toward a child who consistently misbehaves.

Objective 3:

Teachers should strive to **establish** and maintain a consistent **emotional mood** in themselves during the classroom hours.

Objective 4:

Teacher should learn to **recognize** the signs of personal **distress.**

Objective 5:

Schools should **provide** appropriately trained **resource personnel** who can help the teacher who is burdened by feelings of distress as a result of trying to contend with a highly disruptive child.

RESEARCH FINDINGS RELATING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

In this brief review of the results of research which focuses on the disruptive child in the classroom, no attempt has been made to provide an exhaustive treatment of the literature. However, the information provided represents areas which may be of specific interest to the classroom teacher and school administrator.

In the literature, one finds general consensus among researchers in regard to the behaviors most often considered as disruptive. Children labeled as disruptive are described as being verbally and physically aggressive: they interrupt classes consistently, talk out of turn, leave their seats without permission, provoke those seated close to them, manifest violent tantrums, frequently cling to the teacher.

In the etiology of disruptive behaviors, one factor draws unanimity in the literature. According to the results of most research, disruptive children tend to be from families in which they experience parental rejection, inconsistent discipline, and emotional neglect. The mothers of highly aggressive children have been characterized as openly hostile and generally immature. In some reports, disruptive children were associated with homes where antisocial behavior was the rule rather than the exception and the incidence of psychopathology was not an uncommon occurrence.

Some research has focused on the school environment. It has been suggested that certain physical conditions in the classroom encourage disruptive behavior. Such factors as school room design and school construction indirectly contribute to the provocation of a variety of misbehaviors.

The idea that allergies (food, inhalant, preservative) might be responsible for classroom misbehavior has been advanced by the results of some research. Such foods as milk, chocolate, and wheat have received the greatest attention in this regard.

The factors of linguistic difficulties, racial and ethnic membership, and the stresses of lower-class life have been probed in research on the child who disrupts. Results of most of this research suggest that a gulf exists between the home/community values of some children and the values deemed important by the school. In addition, some children view school as requiring great conformity, or are convinced that school is a place of frustration and failure.

Whatever theories are advanced to explain the etiology of disruptive behavior, the classroom teacher must contend with its manifestation while trying to teach the child. Much more applied research must be performed in order to produce valid management methods, which will allow the job of teaching to be effectively performed.

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The major objective of *The Disruptive Student and the Teacher* is to provide a set of suggestions which can be utilized by the classroom teacher in the management of disruptive behaviors. The scope of the suggestions covers behaviors which span the spectrum from mild periodic disruptions to highly unacceptable expressions which are chronic in their occurrence. The author of this report in NEA's Professional Studies Series believes the precipitating basis for most disruptive behavior in the classroom is a state of *distress* manifested by the student as a result of conditions which prevail in the home, in the school, or both. The material is presented in three specific stages, beginning with general background information, continuing with a set of objectives which relate to the role of the teacher and the disruptive student, and concluding with recommended techniques for classroom management. The author, L. Wendell Rivers, is Director of the Mental Health Specialists' Program at the University of Missouri, St. Louis; Associate Professor at Washington University, St. Louis; and Adjunct Professor of Community Medicine at St. Louis University School of Medicine.

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